

Avoiding cross-contamination in your food business

Guidance on how to prevent cross-contamination.

What is cross-contamination

Cross-contamination is when bacteria is spread between food, surfaces or equipment.

Raw food

It is most likely to happen when raw food touches or drips onto ready-to-eat food, equipment or surfaces. For example, if raw meat drips onto a cake in the fridge, bacteria will spread from the meat to the cake.

Equipment

It can also happen when you use the same equipment for raw and ready-to-eat food. For example, if you cut raw chicken on a chopping board, bacteria will spread from the chicken to the board and knife. If you then use the same board and knife (without washing and disinfecting them thoroughly) to chop a cucumber, the bacteria will spread from the board and knife to the cucumber.

Hands

Hands can also spread bacteria. If you do not wash your hands thoroughly after touching raw food, you can spread bacteria to the other things you touch.

Cross-contamination is one of the most common causes of food poisoning.

Preventing cross-contamination

You must ensure that work areas, surfaces and equipment used for raw and ready-to-eat food are adequately separated.

To avoid cross-contamination you should also:

- [clean and disinfect work surfaces](#), chopping boards and equipment thoroughly before you start preparing food and after you have used them to prepare raw food
- use different equipment (including chopping boards and knives) for raw meat/poultry and ready-to-eat food unless they can be heat disinfected in, for example, a commercial dishwasher
- [wash your hands](#) thoroughly before preparing food and after touching raw food
- [always keep raw and ready-to-eat food separate](#), including packaging material for ready-to-eat food
- store raw food below ready-to-eat food in the fridge - use separate fridges for raw and ready-to-eat food if possible
- provide separate [food preparation areas](#), storage facilities, clothing and staff for the handling of ready-to-eat food

- if raw and ready-to-eat food need to be handled in the same preparation area, ensure the area is thoroughly disinfected between these uses.
- use separate machinery and equipment, such as [vacuum packing machines](#), slicers and mincers, for raw and ready-to-eat food or ensure they are thoroughly disinfected between uses
- use separate cleaning materials, including [cloths, sponges and mops](#) in areas where ready-to-eat foods are stored, handled and prepared
- make sure that your staff know how to avoid cross-contamination

Preventing E. coli cross-contamination

We provide guidance on reducing the risk of [E.coli cross-contamination](#) which can also help to control other bacteria including salmonella and campylobacter.

Food safety coaching videos

How to avoid cross-contamination in your food business

Remember: When you start a new food business or take over an existing business, [you must register with your local authority](#).